

Damn it, Why the sad song? by Lockedinwithlife

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Summary:

Steve Harrington, unofficial mom figure of the party, is pretty frickin' angsty. He's got the mixtapes to prove it.

1. In which Steve is a fluffball of angst

Before all of the crazy shit that went down, Steve Harrington's typical weekend was blaring music from his dad's boombox while floating in his pool at night, a six pack well within his reach. Now, Steve sat on the floor of Mike Wheeler's basement with five younger kids screaming at each other while playing Dungeons and Dragons.

It was a strange thing, seeing these kids so dedicated to one thing and happy to be doing it. Sure, Steve felt dedicated to basketball, but he hasn't enjoyed playing the game in a long time; a little part of him knew him playing was just wanting to be useful in some way, so when these little shits asked him to start attending the game, Steve didn't think twice about dropping basketball.

After the night the gate closed, Max and him were both completely accepted into the "party," according to Dustin; Steve at first didn't know what the hell he had gotten himself into, but soon it became clear that he became the unofficial supervision of the party to the parents. Steve didn't mind, seeing as his social status was dragged to the pits of Hell when he ditched Tommy and Carol and his relationship with Nancy ended. So the former king became Steve the mother hen, sitting on the floor listening to the party flounder as all of their actions became useless against the enemy.

"You guys finish up! It's getting late, and I need my beauty sleep!" Mike's mom yelled from upstairs, and Steve glanced at the clock reading that it was almost two in the morning. The group continued bickering until Steve whistled in warning. The grumbled as they cleaned up the mess of paper and food. Mike looked as angsty as ever, but his voice was clear when he talked through his radio, saying goodnight to 11. The group had their stuff cleaned up within 20 minutes, and they headed upstairs, their adrenaline faded.

"Mom, can I go with Steve to drop the others off?" Mike yelled in the house, but didn't bother to wait for a reply as the party exited the door and piled in Steve's car (Steve took her silence as acceptance, or she already fell asleep and followed the group to his car.) Will insisted on choosing the music, so he sat in the front, flipping through the tapes Steve had.

“Steve, why do you have such a terrible taste in-footloose? Really, Steve? Aha, a mixtape! Ghostbusters, yes, we’re listening to this.” Will finally picked one of Steve’s newest tapes, and Steve didn’t know how to feel about it. He put a shit tone of sad songs on it because he felt like it. So yeah, The Smiths and The Cure spoke to him in those moments. He had put Ghostbusters as the first song to try to get himself happy again (which failed.)

After ghostbusters ended, (which got the kids very riled up, insisting they ride around the block before anyone got dropped off) Steve tensed as the teenage angst songs flowed through his speakers. He resisted the urge to change it, as Will was so happy about being able to choose the music.

“Steve, what is this bullshit?” Dustin asked from the back as the notes filled the car. Steve said nothing as he pulled into the Bryers front yard. He turned off the car, got out, and motioned for Will to follow. Steve felt like he needed to personally take each kid inside their respective house (especially Will) to insure the parents knew their kid had returned safe and sound. Instead of Joyce Bryers, sadly, it was Jonathan and Nancy. Needless to say, Steve made his escape quick after saying goodnight to Will.

Steve clambered into the car, almost wanting to keep the tape in after the awkward moment, but his better judgment allowed him to pull out a popular album out of his collection. No one said anything through the rest of the ride.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hope you enjoy! (First chapter is slow, if you want to be a beta reader please talk to me on my tumblr/instagram @lockedinwithlife).

2. Crisp Black Sky

Steve once again found himself alone in his home, his father probably still at work and his mother god knows where. Steve considered going out in the pool, but the woods constantly stared at him like it was watching his every movement. The living room felt dead, the TV humming with static on the screen, and the urge to go in the pool became less intimidating. Truthfully, Steve had only gone in the pool during the day two weeks ago when his dad told him he should do a couple laps to build up steam again after Steve told him he was going to quit the basketball team, insisting he just was in a rough patch after he and Nancy broke up and needed to clear his head though the water. It had helped a little, though Steve still quit the team.

After getting changed, Steve grabbed a Soft Cell album from the tape tower and headed outside, the boombox heavy in his other hand. When he had it all set up and playing, Steve slowly got in the pool, letting himself get adjusted to freezing cold water. He dived in last minute to get his hair wet. He opened his eyes as he slowly floated back to the top, letting the chlorine sting blurr his vision. When he reached the open air he took a long quiet breath as he stared up to the stars. Funny, how something so constant to humans were just seen to all. Sure, at different times, but still same in its own right. It gave Steve a sense of normalcy that he hadn't felt in a while; the cold brought him to the now, the low and muffled radio playing comforting sound from the poolside.

He zoned out, looking at the crispness of the black, and what felt like seconds turned into hours. Steve finally got out of the pool at about five A.M., but decided to watch the sunrise. His skin felt rough from the water. He went inside to get his dad's Polaroid, and it just so happened that his mom came through the front door when he found the item. Unsure of whether to make himself known or not, Steve quietly went back through the pool screen doors, camera ready. He may not be as good as Byers, but honestly, Steve didn't care. A sunrise is a good fucking moment. Steve re-winded the tape and listened as he waited for the warm glow of the sun to come up. As the sun became almost clear, pinks mixing with the blue, Steve took a shot.

He waited for the hum of the camera to end before moving, afraid of messing up anything. Steve carefully put the undeveloped photo beneath his radio so it would be in darkness. He stared up at the mixing colors, and then walked inside to take a shower.

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Steve sipped his coffee carefully, his skin dry and hair perfect. He needed to start heading out soon for school, so he was careful to enjoy the moment of bliss that caffeine brought to him. The phone rang as Steve put the last bit of the drink to his lips, and caused him to jump a bit and spill his coffee.

“Shit!” He hissed as coffee fell on to his shirt. He sighed as he walked to the phone dabbing useless on his shirt with a cloth he had found nearby. He picked up the phone begrudgingly, and sighed when he saw the phone number.

“Dustin, what do you want?” Steve sighed in defeat. “Ah, Harrington! What a wonderful morning, am I right or am I rig-”

“Please get to the damn point, you little shit.” Steve said tiredly. Steve had felt beat from lack of sleep and useless coffee. The last thing Steve had expected was a call from one of the kids at 5 in the morning on a Monday.

“Well, since you ask, I need a ride. My bike’s tire went flat, and I don’t have time to fix it, and since you go to the high school, I was just thinking that you could give me a ride.” Dustin rushed. Steve had to be honest, he was slightly happy that the little shit had thought of him in a time of need. He found himself saying yes before he could even think.

“Alright, I’ll be there in 10 minutes.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Oof, this is still going no where yet, but don't worry!
We'll get there, and don't forget (if you can/want to)
message me on my tumblr/instagram to
lockedinwithlife about becoming a beta reader!

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

Trigger warnings: Mention of past abuse/neglect

“Greetings, my good man! Lovely morning to be driving, isn’t it?” Dustin said happily as he opened the passenger door of Steve’s car. “Mind if I put on a tape?” Dustin asks lazily, and Steve told him sure and nodded towards the collection of tapes. “So, that tape we listened to the other night. What was that about?” Dustin tried to cover up his worry with a laid back tone. Steve tensed a bit, before putting on his oh-so-famous ego.

“A man is not a man until he makes a tape of sad songs in three in the morning, little dude. This is my lesson I give to you,” Steve said with bravado. Dustin rolled his eyes and turned his attention back to the the tapes. Dustin flipped through a bunch of them, before finding one that he seemed to not hate. Thankfully this time it was just Uriah Heep, and he was happy when the drums flooded the car and woke him up completely. Dustin had occupied himself with singing all the lyrics, and Steve eventually gave in and started singing too. “You’ve got good taste, kid.” Steve told the boy after the first couple songs ended. Dustin smiled at Steve.

“Well, you made the mixtape, so you’re technically complimenting yourself, aren’t you? Thanks anyways Steve. I know I am amazing,” Dustin laughed and made the purring noise thing that he does. Steve rolled his eyes as he pulled into the school parking lot.

“Keep that confidence, little shit. The girls will love that, I’m sure of it. See you and the rest of the nerds later,” Steve called as Dustin got out of the car. Steve made his way to the high school, music still blaring through his speakers.

Steve had been sitting in English class for 10 minutes, and he was starting to question why he was still in school. Sure, graduating high school seemed important to Nancy, but after they were done? Steve

dreaded the piles of homework and unfinished essays, the drafts of all the ridiculous resumes he once thought were good, all of the failed tests that just mocked him for being the idiot he already knew he was. Steve focused towards the front of the class, making himself determined to focus and try to learn something.

It should've been easy, sitting there, listening to what the teacher said, and writing whatever shit seemed important, but it felt like all his thoughts were fighting in his head.

Steve felt nauseous and overwhelmed, and just needed to get out, to get some air, to have something. Steve grabbed the teacher's attention to show he needed to leave. The teacher just nodded and continued with the lesson while Steve rushed out. He barely made it to the bathroom before he threw up, his whole body shaking. "Shit..." Steve said hoarsely to himself as he sat in the stall. *Why are you so fucking weak?*

Steve didn't know when he started calling his step-mom just *mom*. When did he did it start? Was it when she got fed up with his "disrespect," and ended with Steve spending two weeks in his car? Was it when she fucked him up so bad that he didn't go to school for a week? Or was it the times where she pretended to her friends and was suddenly a fucking saint to the boy who lost his actual mother to a tumor?

The woman he now called mom was on the other side of the school phone line, for some reason acting like she cared. "Oh Steve, honey, your father and I will be leaving for our trip in an hour. What did you need sweetheart?" She asked innocently. "I just wanted to let you know I was going to be late. I'm giving some kids a ride."

"Okay, Steve. What did I say about telling me useless things? Your father and I aren't even going to be here for two weeks, and this is how you choose to spend my time with? Drive safe, if you get anyone killed it's all on you." She hung up the phone. Steve pretended to laugh and said "I love you too," to the dead line, as to keep the office woman smiling.

"Alrighty sweetie. Now get to class, and you're welcome to take a peppermint on your way out. Say hi to your mom for me, will you?" The woman told him as he smiled and walked out.

He popped the peppermint in his mouth, grateful for the fresh taste in his sore throat. Earlier Steve had cleaned himself up, but he stayed in the bathroom until the bang rang.

He rushed earlier to grab his bag and had headed to the office before lunch officially began. For some reason, he felt the urge to call his house, hopeful that he could convince his dad to let him come home. Steve had forgotten about the business trip, and regretted calling the house as soon as he did remember.

At least the house will be empty, the positive side of Steve said. Unfortunately, Steve's pessimism also had words. *Do you really want it to be? There are monsters in the dark, you've seen them, you should be afraid. Your house is where Barb got taken, after all.*

Before all this, an empty house meant music. It meant a party, even if was with his shitty friends. Now? It meant silence, an anticipation of something going to attack. Steve knew the gates were closed, but it did little to help his anxieties. Going in the pool that night was a possible step to moving on from everything that had happened, but it was only a small step.

"Steve, what the *hell* are those?" Dustin asked Steve as he walked in the kitchen.

"Well, I believe that they are cookies, wouldn't you say so?" Steve remarked as he piled them on the plate. "Well, yes, but why?"

"Because I am adult, Dustin. This is what adults do."

"Steve, did you hand make them?"

"It's not that hard, Dustin, there are like five ingredients and practically every cookbook has a recipe. The question you should be asking if wonderful Steve Harrington will be more angelic then he already is and give you little shits the gift of my cookies." Steve

finally says. Dustin rolls his eyes and goes to grab a cookie, but Steve catches his hand and slaps it away.

Steve takes the plate and carries it downstairs with Dustin on his trail. He had made three types of cookies: chocolate chip, peanut butter, and sugar while the kids played their game. "Dustin, hurry up with the food!" Steve heard Lucas call, and Steve stopped mid step to give Dustin a cookie. When Dustin gave him a look, he replied with "The messenger never gets the cut they deserve, so take this kid." Before starting to walking again. Dustin was very gracious after, complimenting Steve's baking skills. When they reached the bottom of the stairs, the party looked at Steve and sighed.

"Steve, do the party a favor for the greater good and eat or destroy the cookies. Mrs. Wheeler has good intentions, I'm sure, but I don't think she actually looks at baking ingredients." Lucas stated

"Guys, Steve made the cookies. I can vouch for their deliciousness!" Dustin exclaimed, and reached for another cookie. Steve nodded and put the plate in Dustin's hand, and turned to leave. "Hey shithead, where the hell do you think you're going?" Dustin pulled Steve back before he even reached the stairs, and Steve felt really awkward as he sat on the floor next to Max. He looked on as the kids greedily took their share of the cookies, and Steve was surprised at the complements he was getting. He was actually getting praise for doing something he actually liked to do. It was a different kind of pride that Steve wasn't used to.

"DUSTIN, I WILL KILL YOU FOR IT!" Lucas screeched as he and Dustin both dived in for the last cookie. Steve took control of the situation by taking the cookie before either of them reached it and took a chunk out of it.

"Delicious."

4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

The house was empty. It had been empty before (obviously), but when it was, Steve was typically too exhausted to care (or at least, he decided to ignore his fears while he tried to sleep) about it.

But now the silence and the creeping of the night mocked his fears with the slightest of movements. Around this time, Steve had found himself typically maxing mix tapes to avoid his problems. One song at a time, Steve successfully ignored each problem that he faced and went on living as a future middle class American.

Of course, he did not do that tonight.

No, he was very awake, and he was too focused on the horrors that the dark hid to be distracted by notes from a box. He had turned all the lights on in the house, like fucking baby. He stayed away from the windows, and decided to just sit in his den, finding the nook near shelves stacked with books to be the most comfortable position. *Why are you acting like such a baby? You've beaten monsters with a bat before, you'll be fine.* Steve tried to reassure himself, but only saw images of being overwhelmed by the demodogs, and him and the kids only leaving alive by chance.

Steve tried to ignore the panic feelings in his chest by getting up and walking to the kitchen, hoping food would help calm him, but the phone rang as he got up. While he struggled with memories of the Bryers phone, he knows that he has to move on. He picked up the

phone carefully.

“Harrington? Is it you?” A familiar cop asks through the phone. Steve sighed a bit in relief before panicking if he did something wrong.

“Why, yes this is Steve Harrington, completely innocent Steve Harrington,” Steve joked weakly. Hopper still intimidated him, though he was a little more trusting of the man after he saw much he cared for the 11 girl. Steve was a sucker for their little family, even if it was pretty odd.

“Here is the deal, kid. The wheeler kid wants to see Jane, and Jane deserves to be out and about like a normal kid. Now I let her go to the Snow Ball, and now she can’t wait to go to school. I’m hoping one of those game nights with the kids will help her. You get me so far?” Hopper asked Steve. Steve mumbled a yes, still a little thankful for the ‘company’.

“The thing is, I am not bringing the kids to the cabin. I think that could be potentially bad for Joyce’s boy, and also it would seem odd. We can’t go to any of the kids house, as Jane isn’t quite a ‘normal’ person, and Joyce has enough on her plate. So Harrington, as your parents aren’t home this weekend, and you’re in the middle of nowhere, would you mind taking in the kids?” The chief of police tiredly asked. It was clear that he’d thought this through, and Steve wasn’t too much of an asshole anymore (or at least he was trying not to be), so Steve heard himself say yes before really thinking about it.

The chief sighed in relief, thanked him, and told him to expect them soon.

Steve didn't know what Hopper thought 'soon' meant. Steve barely had time to get dressed before his doorbell rang with Hopper and Jane at the door. Steve waved them both in, and Hopper explained he'd be here until the others showed up so he could set up some alarm systems outside.

Jane flicked through TV shows (with her mind, Steve added) until she settled on a cheesy soap opera. The three watched the show, and while both Steve & Hopper feigned to be interested, by the end they were both already noting the name of their new favorite show. The episode ended, and Hopper tried to pass the time through talking.

"So, Harrington. Nice house. There's a pool and everything." Hopper tried, probably unsure of why he was trying small talk. He didn't seem like a small talk kind of guy, and if so, Steve would appreciate that kind of Hopper right now.

"Ah, thanks Hopper. Yeah, dad got the pool installed when I asked about joining the swim team." Steve replied awkwardly. In truth, Steve's dad *had* gotten the pool because Steve wanted to join the swim team instead of doing basketball in middle school, so his dad's response was to buy a pool so he wouldn't have to be on the swim team to have all day access to a pool.

Steve enjoyed swimming, and so did his mom. His actual mom, that is. She and him would spend hours just messing around when his dad wasn't there. When he was, they'd play basketball until dinner was made.

"So, kid... how have you been holding up? And don't say fine,

because that's bullcrap." Hopper said seriously. Steve chuckled sarcastically.

"Hey, I thought I was the mom friend. Besides, what about you? You went through some deep shit." Steve dodged the question. Hopper shrugged, but still looked at him, urging him to continue.

"Alright, fine. It's not be the greatest. My mom has won over my dad and they've both been a pain-in-the-ass since I quit basketball. On top of all that, I keep thinking something is going to come out of the woods and attack me. The Gate is closed, sure, but it doesn't help? I keep hearing those... demodogs... in every silent room. Every time I walk outside I have to face the fact that Barbra was snatched in my pool. I ignored it for the first time around, but that was because I had Nancy as my focus. Now it's just me." Steve let it all loose, and he didn't regret it. Hopper nodded knowingly and encouragingly.

"It must be hard not being able to be supported by your parents, and that's especially true since they don't know about any of... this." Hopper pointed out helpfully. Steve nodded and they both went back to watching the TV, Eleven still watching the soap opera.

Steve was kind of excited for the group hangout.

5. Chapter 5

Steve officially never wanted children. Or at least, if these shitheads were a fair representation of his 'parenting', he wanted to cut off his own dick right now.

After Hopper had left, everything turned to utter Hell. Books were thrown, and so were other children. Currently Steve was trying to find Dustin's... whatever the fuck it was out of the deep end of the pool. After he finally fucking gets it, he comes into the living room to find the little shits over his tape tower, as it had fallen over. Hand over hip, he whistled them to attention.

"Everyone sit down!" Steve commanded, earning rolled eyes and only Max and Lucas listening, but that was because they fell down. "What did I just say? You're in my house now little shits, so sit or none of my food will be given to you."

"You have to feed us, asshole." Dustin piped up earning a hard glare from Steve. Steve shrugged and raised his eyebrows, his hand still on his hip.

"Not with that language you little shit. Sit down." Steve replied with more demand. They listened this time, but that was because they didn't know if Steve would actually starve them or just give them potato chips and water.

"Alright. Now here is the plan: I am going to clean up my tapes, and you shi*heads are going to help me. You guys are going to worry about seeing if all my tapes survived, but wait while I clean up the glass. While *I* am cleaning up *your* mess, you shits are going to set up

your nerd game or whatever. Pick a room; there's the upstairs lounge room and there's the living room obviously."

Steve told them, but they seemed to dislike their options. Dustin rolled his eyes.

"We need a cave. What about your basement?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"What does that mean?"

"Because, that's what."

"Steve, you're being a real asshole right now."

"I am being a responsible babysitter. There's a ton of expensive shit down there and *you shits* would break something." Steve tried to end the conversation, but the kids were already up (though Mike was more caring about holding L's hand instead of the current situation.) There wasn't anything actually expensive down there, but he hadn't been in the basement since his mom died. He sure as hell wasn't going to today.

“Come on Lucas, let’s go set up in here. This is so lame,” Dustin complained. Steve rolled his eyes. He needed time to work through his shit, and right now wasn’t right. *It’s been 7 fucking years. When is the right time going to happen?* Steve looked at Dustin before looking outside and sighed in defeat.

“Fine, you privileged fricks. Give me twenty minutes to clean it up, if one of you died from dust inhalation or some shit.”

Steve didn’t know what he was so afraid of. The ghost of his mom floating in one of the last places he’d seen her happy? Broken glass flying around? Steve realized that the room was just a room, but it still hurt a bit. He had a bandana on as dusted off all the old crap that sat on the floor. It was mostly junk; things like old photos and other memorabilia.

Much of it was his mom’s, and that hurt to look at in the way that causes you to have a midlife crisis. He moved the boxes to the corner and set up the room as close to the Wheelers basement as he could. He put the table and soft chairs near the game board area and put a lamp over there to get the lighting right (the ceiling light was a little dim, and he didn’t want those shits to go blind because of it.) He had everything set up the way that seemed that pretty chill (which included an amazing lava lamp and a cool lighting lamp.)

He looked for any tapes around, but only found records. He picked a random one and put it on the record player softly. Soft beatles music

came through the player, and he almost laughed at how mainstream his mom's taste was. He didn't care though, did he? Who needed emotions when you could be "King" Steve.

Steve headed upstairs before he got all *The Breakfast Club* in front of a bunch of preteens. Steve sighed as he stepped into his living room, preparing himself for any stupid decisions that had been made, and was pleasantly surprised when he found them crowded and playing with his old atari.

"Hey, the basement is ready. So, yeah." Steve said awkwardly, startling the kids (except Dustin and Max who were very focused on the game.) Lucas gathered their nerd shit with Mike and Will following suit. Jane picked up a box of eggos carefully (how the *fuck* did she get eggos? Steve's family hasn't owned eggos since he was five!)

The party brought their stuff downstairs after Max crushed Dustin in a dramatic fashion, showing off her dominance. The group did seem pretty relaxed in the room, so that was a plus. The music was still on the same song, though it was at the very end. Mike set up his little area of books and writing. Steve had an inkling that Mike was the controller of the game or some shit, but he didn't care that much to actually learn the terms, as it really pissed off Dustin when he said something wrong.

"Steve, take this. We're starting a new campaign, and we need an even number according to Mike. It's six or its a really boring game," Dustin said mischievously. These shits planned this, but how long ago? Steve didn't know if he felt proud, annoyed or both.

"I've finally hit rock bottom, playing a nerd game. I used to host

dangerous parties but now-”

“Yes, we get it, we're lame losers and shit. Now sit your ass down, Harrington.” Max told him. Steve rolled his eyes as he pulled a chair up to the table.

“Alright, now let’s talk about your character...”

-

It was 12 A.M. before he even thought about dinner. Steve checked his watch, and he was angry at himself for not noticing anything. Steve whistled at the group and pointed towards the stairs.

“If we’re going to be playing any longer, you shits are at least going to be eating tonight. Come on. Now, who wants to help me make pizza?” Steve said as stood up. The kids shrugged but none spoke, obviously a little startled at the interruption. Steve had to admit, the game was pretty immersive.

As they climbed up the stairs, the group talked a little about what had been happening. Steve had done some crazy shit involving goblins, lots of luck, and a surplus of oil & a torch. It was pretty fucking amazing, or psychotic. Steve sometimes got the two mixed up.

The party settled down outside around the pool. They put their feet in while Steve went to make pizza alone, and left Jane and Max in

charge (an unlikely duo, but Steve knew Max wouldn't let Jane be persuaded into dumping the pool or some shit on anyone.)

When he came back, Will was lying back on the pavement. Steve put the pizzas down on one of the tables. He had also brought some soft drinks out too and set them on the ground. Most of the group was looking at the stars too, or just looking at the lit up pool. Steve quietly set up chairs around the little open fireplace and started the fire. He dished out the slices evenly before calling out the kids to eat.

Steve ate happily as they sat by the fire.

Notes for the Chapter:

Ey I want to say that I appreciate your kudos and comments (I do reply) and I'm still asking for a beta reader so if you're interested tell me :D

6. Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

Everything is all over the place, oof.

Steve only *slightly* regretted staying up until 6 A.M. on a Friday night (he went to bed about three hours after the kids to being the responsible one; he had to make sure those little shits didn't try to sneak a beer or something,) but at least it wasn't as bad as a hangover. Steve woke up with only about 2 hours of sleep supporting him, but he got up to make pancakes and waffles.

Steve liked baking and cooking for other people. It made him feel like he was 9 again, making breakfast in bed for his mom and dad's anniversary. Steve put the bacon in the microwave and started on his mom's famous fluffy pancakes and box recipe waffles. By the time the kids came out he had set up the table with plates all around, homemade whip cream (and canned), a huge stack of the breakfast food, and other toppings.

Jane and Max came from the basement, and the boys from upstairs in the guest rooms. An unfair rooming situation, but it was easier to deal with the idiots since they were so fucking loud, so putting them five rooms away from the girls was the best sleeping arrangement (especially since Max was a very grumpy tired person, and would actually kill the others if she lost sleep because of them.)

Steve greedily ate his chocolate chip pancakes smothered in whip cream and drowned in caramel syrup and topped with bacon. The others did the same, and he was pleased to see all the kids enjoying the meal.

“Steve, when did you become such a mom?” Dustin asked happily as he sipped his milk. Steve rolled his eyes. He was too tired to think, so he said the first thing to come to his mind.

“Why don’t you ask my mom?” He replied rubbing his tired eyes. He panicked before realizing that they don’t know about his actual mom. A lot of kids didn’t, including Jonathan and possibly Nancy. It wasn’t like it was just casual conversation; when was he supposed to say “Hey, my mom died of a brain tumor while my dad went and started fuc#ing some high class lady before my mom’s body even went cold, how about that!”

The only reason they’d know was if they went to her funeral, but it was a while ago, and if it was only subtly talked about at salons and his step-mom’s workplace. “ *Such a tragedy, to lose a mother at such a prime age. I heard he was there, with her. You’re such a doll to find love in such a heartbreak.*” Steve had heard when his dad took his step-mom to get her hair done. He’d also got his hair done by force of the beauticians wanting to “fix” his pretty hair.

That was one good thing that came out of that day, as he learned of the majesticness of his hair.

Steve got Dustin and Lucas to clean up the dishes as Mike and Will put up the aftermath of cooking. Jane and Max happily ate the rest of the waffles (Jane discovered the waffle, bacon, and whip cream sandwich was a great combo.)

Steve helped wipe off the table and move Maxes and Janes leftover party on the coffee table of the living room. He was still filled with happiness of cooking, as he hadn’t done it in this scale in a while.

Unfortunately, the last homemade meal he made for people was a complete disaster, as he had gotten his as# handed to him for using

the rest of the oil and then burning the fried chicken making a lot of smoke (which the chicken was still raw apparently) and proceeded by freaking out and calling his dad (who was at a conference), who called his step-mom (who was also at work). The end wasn't pretty, but he still went and bought KFC afterwards, which was its own reward.

That also ended in him spending two weeks in his car, regretting that finger-lickin' good chicken. He was still on the basketball team at the point though, so showers were not a problem. School food wasn't great, but it was something. By the time his dad came back from his business trip his mom had dragged him back to the house and told him to clean up the house before his dad came up and to clean himself up while he was at it.

Steve had avoided his kitchen for awhile since then, but he had also avoided the basement for seven years. He thought that these kids deserve money for getting him to face his fears. Or at least an award for their stubbornness.

Or maybe they were just rubbing off hope for a better him. Who knows.

Honestly, Nancy Wheeler is the most healthy relationship he has ever had in his life, and it was including the majority of time that she only pretended to love him.

Which is why he had gone to the Wheeler's house with flowers to restore a fake relationship before they had closed the gate. *Why is it that whenever I try to mend Nancy and I, I end up fighting a monster with a spiked bat?*

Steve thought about his asshole self making an assumption about Nancy, trying to fix it, and we can't forget how he got a bat and smacked a monster whose face opened up. Weird shit went down. Then he thought about all the extra shit that happened this year, and how Jonathan and her were together; how he wanted her to be happy, even if he was broken up about it.

So when Mike gets in a screaming match with him, Steve can't help but think about confronting Nancy and about how much of a dick he was and still is.

"You don't get a say, asshole! Why? Why can't El spend more time with us? Why not get Hopper to pick her up after work? You don't get to take her away from me!" Mike cried out, Jane behind him. Hopper had asked Steve to take her home because he got backed up at work, but he had wanted her to be home by 5:15 P.M. or close to it (don't ask Steve.) Steve had a feeling this really had nothing to do with Steve, so Steve decided to take the hits and listen to the kid, but Steve also didn't want the kid to murder him.

"Hey! I'm not taking anyone away for life here! I'm just doing what Hopper told me-"

"What? Are you afraid of him? Why don't you just waltz in and hit him with your bat? Or are you afraid, or can you even fight? Billy took you out in less than five minutes. The amazing Steve, that's so afraid of actual human confrontation he'd rather give in to peer

pressure and force other people to be with him! How the Hell did Nancy even have a hint of love for you? You just walk in and take control. You don't care!" Mike yelled, still in a defensive front of Jane. The others were sitting out by the pool (though they were still aware of the shit going on in the other room.)

This kid knew all his damn insecurities (most of them, anyways) and just threw them all up on him.

"I don't care, huh? Maybe you're right about that." Steve just took the hit. He already knew the kid was going to regret what he had said, so here was no point in egging him on. Or maybe it was his lack of confrontation skills, as he was ready to just melt into the floor and cry. So, like a mature adult, he checked on the other kids, told Mike and Jane to sit with the others until he got the situation in order, and finally grabbed his tape player and blank tapes and went to the basement.

"Fuck." He said in the silence of the room. He had sank to the bare floor when he had closed the door. This is what he did now. Shut down after all the adrenaline, or in this case a simple child calling out his shit. It's been a while since his last breakdown, why not have one now?

He looked at the pile of his mom's stuff that he had just shoved into the corner. What a fucking metaphor, right? His mom's stuff in the corner, just like where Steve had put all his stupid fucking happy memories of her. Steve felt the strong urge to just toss it across the room, and he lacked self-control, so it happened in a matter of seconds. Steve felt hot tears on his face as he thought about her stupid fucking smile, and her stupid fucking tumor. Everything was just so fucking *fucked*.

On the floor laid pictures of people he didn't remember, clothes he vaguely remembered her wearing on sunny days, and so many random papers fell out as the box flew across the room. Now *this* was a *Breakfast Club* moment.

"FUCK." Steve muttered, grabbing his hair in frustration of letting his anger make another stupid decision. He went to go pick it up when halfway through the door opened up revealing Dustin.

"Hey asshole, Mike's sorry about being a fellow asshole- what's all that?" Dustin asked as the door closed behind him.

"My mom's shi#. Just threw it across the room because that's how adults handle their emotions. Help me pick it up." Steve said fluidly. Dustin said nothing as he started to pick things up, but soon he stopped when he found a piece of paper.

"Aw, look! It's a tiny Harington~" Dustin teased, already running up the stairs. Steve tensed, but let the kid go. This wasn't Dustin's mess to clean up anyway's, why should Steve force him to do it. Soon he had picked up all the stuff. He stored it back to its place, and focused on his tapes. Time for a shitty emotional teen special. He expertly got through his tape before remembering about needing to take the kids home.

He walked up the stairs and to the living room, ready to see the house torn up, but was shown the kids playing with the atari, Mike and El leaning on each other. Steve tapped Dustin on the shoulder (he was currently reading his dad's magazine issue of *National Geographic*) and decided it was time for the kids to leave.

“Hey, little shits. Time to go, I think we all need a little space,” Steve laughed without humor. The kids hummed in agreement and went to grab their stuff. He walked to the kitchen and pulled out the cookie dough he had made Saturday for a mid-day snack and quickly sorted it and stuck it in the oven. The smell comforted him as he flipped through an old issue of *Seventeen*.

By the time he got to the end of it, the cookies were done and cooled off, and so were the kids. They were obviously tired from lack of energy and of each other after all the tension that had gone down with Mike.

He slid the cookies into a big ziplock and guided the kids out of the house. Steve dropped the kids off per request. Lucas and Max were first to be dropped off and then it was Dustin. Jane and Mike sat in the back, they were holding hands and leaning on each other silently.

“So, Mike. Do we want to hang out with El to wait for Hopper? It’d be the responsible thing to do, not leaving a minor alone.” Steve asked nonchalantly to the back. *Not like she could completely decimate something that tried to harm her*, Steve added to himself. When he looked in the rear-view mirror, Steve saw Mike looking down.

“Yeah, that’d be nice.”

“Steve?” Mike quietly asked. “I just wanted to say I’m sorry, okay? That shit I said was a dick move.”

“S’okay. We all say stupid things when we’ve got love on our minds. I know that I’ve had my fair share of fuck ups with your sister; I was already an asshole before, and I showed my ass way too much because I was pretty heartbroken over her. Just, make Jane happy, okay? When you love someone, you have to learn boundaries. Make sure you don't crowd her.” Steve told Mike, even going as far to pat him on the back. Mike looked up.

“Steve, do you still love my sister?” Mike said a little harshly. Steve sighed and looked at the kid.

“You know, I think a part of me always will, but I’ve got other duties to fill. I was a pretty shitty boyfriend, but I think I’ve grown to be a pretty fucking awesome baby sitter.”

Notes for the Chapter:

So, there's a lot more angst in this chapter,,, so,, tell me,,, if I should dial it up or back,,,,, because I don't know to feel,,, oof,, also I would remember that baby picture,,,

7. Chapter 7

“Steve, don’t be alarmed, but I think you were adopted.”

“Dustin, what the fuck?” Steve had just woke up about ten minutes ago, and he wasn’t expecting Dustin Henderson to tell him this.

“Well, Lucas and I were looking at that baby photo and we were going to figure out how to make copies of it with his dad’s copier but then he noticed the lady with you in the photo and Lucas saw that it wasn’t your mom as he’s seen your mom before with his mom at the hair salon and-” Damn, this kid was going to be the end for him. It’s not like he wasn’t trying to hide it; he’s just be distracting everyone from it.

“Ah, Dustin, that’s probably my mom. Like, my birth mom. Lucas must’ve met my step-mom. Why are you freaking out about this?” Steve asked tiredly. Dustin sighed in either relief or some other teen emotion.

“Well, you almost died because of us, you know? I was just freaking out because I thought that you might be sent on like some some weird existential crisis but party members don’t keep secrets and-”

“Dustin, breathe. I’ve... I’ve shed my tears over my mom. She passed away about seven years ago, if you were wondering.” Steve explained into the phone. He had to admit, it was nice having someone worry about his emotional state, but it was weird since it was coming from a nerdy middle schooler.

“Oh, uh, sorry?” Was all Dustin said over the phone.

“Now what were you and Lucas going to do with that photo?”

“We’re innocent.”

“Do you make sad mixtapes because of your mom?”

“Dustin, chill.”

“I just want to to know, that way we can make sense of babysitter Steve.”

“Oh god, is that who I am now? The babysitter and thats it? God, what have I done to deserve this shi#?” Steve sarcastically says as he parks the car in the Bryers driveway. Steve didn’t like talking to the kids about his crap, and after Mike’s blow up it showed they already knew how to use his insecurities against him. Why fuel a fire when you could enjoy the sweet breeze of hiding your emotions?

“You still didn’t answer my question, dipshit.” Dustin pointed out quietly. Steve sighed and turned to him.

“Dustin, I am happy that you care about me, but I am not a project that you need answers to figure out some big picture. I’m just Steve, alright? Yes, I still carry my spiked bat with me in the trunk, and yes, I do have some shitty family problems, but I am still just Steve Harrington.” He explained to Dustin, who looked like he had mixed feeling about the whole thing.

“Fine, but don’t try to off yourself.” The kid quietly said. Steve nodded and got out of the car, and walked to the front door. Joyce opened it up and welcomed him and Dustin inside. She always looked a little more frazzled these days, but she had gone through some crazy fucked up shit.

“You boys want anything? Steve, I have some coffee if you want any.” Joyce told them. They were waiting on Will and Jonathan to come back from a movie so Joyce could go to work and Jonathan go spend time with Nancy at dinner. Dustin tagged along because he had nothing better to do.

“Thanks Ms.Bryers, but I’m good. Coffee has never been good for me.” Steve replies. He told the truth; coffee made him drowsy or paranoid ever since his mom died. Don’t ask him; he doesn't know the logistics of it either. She just gave him a nod as she went to go fill her own cup.

She came back into the living room and sat down while she sipped her drink, eyes skimming over the TV. It must’ve been weird, living here still after all that went down. Steve sometimes felt weird just sitting here, thinking about fighting the demogorgon, fighting Billy, Jane totally destroying a demodog and Dustin shoving it in the fridge, Joyce cleaning up her home with everyone and discovering it

in the fridge, many apologies, and just in general supernatural shit.

Joyce Byers was truly a badass woman.

Steve was starting to think Dustin didn't know why he came to the Byers house. It was kind of obvious that the two aren't used to hanging out with each other without the rest of the party. Their conversation was pretty pitiful, bouncing small talk back and forth, and Steve couldn't watch it anymore.

"Hey, dipshits, want to learn how to make a perfect pizza?" Steve asked the two who were fiddling with D&D books. The two nodded as soon as he asked, and he got up headed towards the kitchen.

"Well first, you gotta make the dough. I personally prefer fluffier crust, but you guys might not. So what's the ruling?"

"Can we make stuffed crust?"

"Yes, we can. All in favor of stuffed crust?" Steve asked, and both kids raised their hands. Steve smiled at the boys agreement. Pizza solves everything.

They may have made too much pizza.

Notes for the Chapter:

Ugh, sorry for the short chapter! Not feeling great today and couldn't really focus on writing :(

8. Chapter 8

“Steve, why do people just hate each other? We could just drop dead at any moment, and we just waste our time drowning ourselves with hatred and just why?” Will Byers asked quietly. Steve had found the boy sitting on his doorstep when he was going to get take out, and immediately brought him in. After some hot chocolate and comfort food the boy had finally spoken.

“Well, not everyone thinks about death 24/7. Or maybe they do? I think in a way, hate allows people to live in their moment of power, but I don’t know kid. Either way, the reasoning never truly justify hurting someone out of hate. Do you want to tell me why we’re talking about this? It’s okay if you don’t.” Steve softly told the boy, unsure of how to string his words together.

Will looked up at him with the softest eyes Steve had ever seen. Will had obviously been crying for God knows how long, and Steve now wanted to cry simply because the boy just looked so damn sad.

“Can we just listen to music? I just...” Will looked back down. Steve smiled at the boy and gave him a motherly bro hug.

“Of course we can. I’m always up for making sad mixtapes at ungodly times.”

“Steve, what do you remember of your mom?” Will asked while the

two sat at the edge of the pool water.

“The basic mom stuff, I guess.”

“We don’t have to-”

“She was just, there, you know? I wasn’t trying to be so blunt, but it’s just...so....her. She was a picture pretty mom, with a few of her own qualities added in. Cooked, cleaned, sang the Beatles all the time; that kind of the thing. She was beautiful in more than one way though. Always made me feel loved and appreciated when I felt alone or rejected. Plus, she was always there for me and smiled at the world. Well, up until we found out she had a tumor. She spent the rest of her days in a hospital thanks to my dad.”

“Here’s to shitty dads.” Will said before taking a sip of his pepsi. Steve felt a little startled by the boy’s cussing, but he smiled a bit and raised his drink too.

“Will, is your dad the reason you came tonight?” Steve asked firmly. Will closed his eyes for a long moment, and Steve had seen that look before. He himself had worn it before.

“Yeah. My mom and Jonathan were talking about him. About how he came to her asking for money last year when I went missing? I just... he was such a shitty dad and husband for the longest time, and when my mom finally broke herself free he thinks he can waltz back into her life and pretend to care about them, just for his could be dead son insurance money. She needed someone, and he knew that.” Will told him. *Damn* .

They sat in silence for a bit while Steve just let the kid lean on his shoulder, and *maybe* they both cried. Cried for shitty things out of their control, just maybe. Steve may or may not have switched his personal soda out for a couple of beers. *Cheers to unhealthy coping mechanisms!*

“When my mom died, my dad got married to Ernestine only three months after. I’m very sure the only reason she’s with him is because he’s rich, but he doesn’t care. He was so desperate for someone to replace my mom that he’d ignore all of her shitty qualities.”

“Like what?”

“Well, she hates my cooking, so that’s obviously a warning sign.” Steve said jokingly, and earned a giggle from Will. It was a nice shift in the tone. Steve let the silence stew for a bit longer before he heard the phone ring from inside.

“Come on Will, that’s probably your mother.” Steve told the boy as he got up. Will got up slowly and walked toward the sliding doors. “She’s not going to be angry. She’ll understand, I’m sure of it Will. The motherhood in that woman is a bond you’ll never break, no matter what.” Steve told the kid before he picked up the phone.

“Steve! Will’s not in his bed and-” Joyce Byers exclaimed through the phone.

“Joyce, it’s okay, Will’s here. He was on my doorstep about six

o'clock and needed some hot coco and cookie talk. He's doing much better now though." Steve quickly assured her. He felt the wave of relief through the phone.

"Thank God, I just- I- thank you, Steve. I'll be right over." She told him. Steve said goodbye as she hung up.

"Kid, you want another cookie? Your mom is going to be here soon, so eat the goods while you can."

"Are you okay, baby?" Joyce asked softly. Will nodded and hugged her warmly before he turned back to his burger (Steve didn't want Will only eating cookies). Joyce turned to Steve after the two broke apart, and pulled him into the living room.

"Steve, while I appreciate the fact you took care of my boy, it's almost 12 p.m. on a school night. You said he got here at six. Why didn't you call me?" Her mother code had kicked in, like Steve had prepped for.

"I just wanted to make sure he was okay. I didn't want to send him on his way after he came to the middle of nowhere if he needed some space from home. He told me about hearing you and Jonathan talk about his dad later. I needed to make sure he knew he was going to be safe at home, and that he knew he had a safe spot here too." Steve quietly explained.

Joyce Byers looked tired. Tired of the universe screwing with her, tired of losing in love, and just in general *tired* .

“Thank you, Steve.” Joyce said while wrapping him in a loving, unexpected yet welcomed, hug.

Notes for the Chapter:

Happy valentines day guys! I thought about doing a special, but decided against it because I'm lazy lmao. I personally am going to binge watch parks and rec while eating a dozen free donuts alone, some wild times am i right

9. Chapter 9

Notes for the Chapter:

Warning: Abuse

“Dad, I-”

“No, before you tell me what’s wrong, I’m going to tell you that Ernesteen is coming home-”

“That's what I’m fucking calling about. I’m done, she just came in and just screamed at me for the last thirty minutes about the shit *you* left. She’s insane.” Steve left out the fact that she trashed the kitchen. Steve hadn't been able to control his rage about he coming back without notice and was hoping his dad would help (though he knew this was pointless.)

“Steve, for the first time in years, I’m happy. The least you could do for me is be a good son which you haven't exactly been doing. You’ve been so unmotivated and disrespectful to your mother since you stopped playing. She loves me, and came all the way to get files for an actual reason in her house. So either get some responsibility or be a child who quits the important shit.” Steve’s dad hung up.

Steve put down the phone and found himself in the kitchen where still unfortunately his mom stood.

“Steven, I hope you realize that this,” Ernesteen gestured to the files in her hand, “Does have consequences. This a very important trip for our business, and the fact that you put this away without telling us

would have ruined it. You're goddamn lucky I remembered this."

Forget the fact I wasn't even here when they left. Steve thought as he nodded to her. He just wanted her to leave again so he could sleep peacefully.

"I'm not leaving tonight. I'm too fucking tired from driving all the way back because of you."

Great.

"Steve, who the fuck is Dustin and why did he call you at three A.M.?" Ernesteen said in his bedroom doorway. Steve snapped up at the mention of the kids.

"What? Did he say why he called?"

"No, I told him to go to bed. I told him to call back when the sun was up. Now who the fuck is he?"

"He's just one of the kids I babysit, chill out." Steve quietly told her while meeting her eyes. Steve was very worried now, but Ernesteen was obviously angry about the call waking her up. It's not his fault she has her room ear distance away from the phone. She walked up to his mattress and struck his face, scratching part of his nose in the

process. Steve bit his tongue, knowing that saying something would make it worse for him. She grabbed his shoulder and spit in his face.

“I won’t ever hear that fucking tone from you.” She said before yanking him out of bed. “Go sleep on the fucking couch, since you care so much about your babysitting job.”

Steve scrambled out of the room to the living room. He waited a while before calling Dustin’s house.

“Dustin? Is that you?” Steve quietly asked when the phone picked up.

“Yeah it is, asshole. You ditched us for a chick? That’s one of the top five party kick out reasons. Unless you’re Mike, then we bitterly talk about you-”

“Jesus, okay. Yeah, no. That was my step-mom, but what did you say about ditching? I- oh shit.” Steve had forgotten about the D&D he’d promised he’d make stroganoff for since his step-mom stormed in. In a rush he had taken off the food and let her scream at him. He lifted his hand to rub his nose before remembering about having a gash on it.

“Ah, shit. Uh, I’m sorry guys. I can bring you it after she leaves tomorrow, okay? Don’t call tonight unless there’s an emergency. Don’t do any super stupid shit. I’m so fucking sorry.” Steve told the boy while he tried not to focus on his pain and the blood trickling down his face.

“Uh, Steve, are you okay? You have the voice.”

“What voice?”

“You know. The voice that you do when you’re pissed off and sad. My mom did that voice when Mews disappeared. You also do it when you see Nancy.”

“I don’t have a voice! Now go to bed you little shits.” Steve hissed before hanging up the phone. He couldn’t believe that he forgot about the kids because of this shit. Those cookies were now going to be a huge comfort to him.

Steve didn’t get any sleep. Well, he had finally gotten a half hour in before Ernesteen told him to get his ass up. Though he was still groggy, he didn’t complain while he did what she asked.

“You look and smell like shit. When Donny and I get back, I expect things to be pristine, do you hear me?” She asked him, and when he muttered an inaudible yes, she pushed him on the floor and asked him again.

“I said, *do you hear me?!?*”

“Yes.” Steve said to the floor, his nose aching. She left after that with

the files she came for. He couldn't help himself as tears ran down his face before he just started fucking losing it. Steve just sat crumpled in a ball letting himself stew in tears and blood.

"What happened to you?" Dustin asked as Steve set the crockpot of stroganoff down.

"I got in fight with the pool's cement." Steve lied easily as he plugged in the pot. The kids snickered while he ignored them and continued to set up for dinner. White lies never hurt anybody, except Nancy and Barb's parents, but Nancy was a very personal person and didn't need to know about any of this shit and this wasn't a Barb situation.

They messed around as they waited for the food to warm up, the air bristled with light hearted play. Steve continued to resist scratching his bruised and bloody nose that he had stupidly not put a band-aid and now seriously regretted it. After he dished out all the food to the kids he grabbed a small plate for himself and they all enjoyed it with small talk here and there.

"I constantly thank god for hamburger helper."

"There was no helper here dipshit. Handmade."

"Steve, why?"

“Because I believe making stroganoff from scratch is the best way for Steve Harrington to make his food.”

“Steve, you are the rich mom who is bored all the time.” Steve rolled his eye and brushed his nose and pain shot through his face. Why is it constantly his nose being broken? He couldn’t hold back his pain as he flinched back.

“Hey dipshit, do you need a band-aid? I think my mom keeps a stash in the bathroom.” Dustin asked, already getting up. Steve didn’t say no, and Dustin continued into the back and quickly came back, bandage in hand.

“Thanks little shit.” Steve pats the boy on his shoulder after he applied the bandage. Steve turned his attention back to the group.

“So, who needs a ride home?”

10. Chapter 10

“So, how’d the shiner happen? Hargrove bothering you? Max will-” Jim Hopper asked Steve while they stood outside of his car.

“No, I just fell getting out of the pool.” Steve told him quickly. He felt uncomfortable lying to Hopper, but he couldn’t let anything happen to Erenesteen. He owed his dad *something* after all the shit he’s pulled.

“Kid, you’ve got to stop drinking when you swim. That’s a dangerous combo.” Hopper tolds him. “Of course, as a minor you shouldn’t drink anyways, but as long as you don’t give any kids that shit you’ve been crushing soda cans.”

That always seemed to be it. Steve drank too much and fell off a tree, that’s why his legs are bruised. Steve drank too much and climbed the roof, Steve drank too much and kissed someone, the list goes on. It’s not like he didn’t argue with them; the truth made Steve feel weak and the lie made him look cool, and that was fine. People believed what they believed.

“You’re right, I know. I’ll lay off.” Steve told him, not looking him in the eyes. Hopper clapped his shoulder supportively.

“You’ll get through this kid. You’re tough, you’ve got grit. It just takes some patience with yourself. My advice is to not take up cigarettes; that’s gonna make it all worse.” Hopper tells him while he lights a cigarette for himself.

Steve resisted the urge to laugh at everything, but Hopper did have a point. Only he could stop this, and maybe he was the cause. Maybe all of this was his fault; not listening enough, not agreeing enough; maybe Steve got himself into this mess. Steve obviously wasn't strong though; he let himself get hit by her. All of this was his fault.

"Kid, you okay?"

"I'm just thinking about all this shit. About why it all went down. If it's...our...fault." Steve told him, tweaking his thoughts so Hopper could assume it's all about the Upside Down.

"None of this is our fault. We're the victims. You've got to realise that." Hopper assured him. It didn't help much, but he still felt a little better. Not everything is Steve's fault; his mom dying probably on the list.

"Yeah, I guess you're right." He lied weakly. They sat for a bit after that before Hopper went back into the car.

"I'll be at your place in half an hour with Jane. You gonna pick the rest up?"

"What?"

"Henderson said that- ah shit. Did you not know about the sleepover? They've been planning all week-"

“Well I’ve learned now, I guess Dustin was going to inform me of this when I picked the shirts up from AV club. You can go in if I’m not there.” Steve sighed as he walked off to his car. He heard Hopper grunt before the man drove off.

“So a sleepover at my place? That I didn’t know I was hosting? When was this agreed upon?”

“Well, El wanted to hang out with us and you’ve been acting weird all week so we thought you’d be the best choice so we could interrogate- no, check on you.” Lucas said from the back.

“You guys are actual the weirdest people I’ve ever met. You could’ve asked me about it and I would’ve said yes dipshi#s, and you think I’ve been acting weird? Please explain that to me.”

“Well, you’ve been like oddly quiet this week. You’ve also not been super helicopter mom around us, just making cookies and shit. It’s kind of sucky.” Max informs him.

“Whatever you say, weirdos.” Steve said while turning up the music.

“That’s another thing! You’ve been just agreeing with whatever we say. I still can’t believe you actually made a fully iced cake with the

words ‘made with love’ on it because Dustin joked about it.” Mike yelled in the back before leaning forward to turn the music back down. Steve just stared forward and went monotone.

“Everything’s fine. Now go back to being nerds that shut up.”

“Harrington, are you sure you’re okay?” Hopper asked as Jane joined the others in the living room.

“Jesus, yes. Just a little frustrated no one deemed it necessary to tell me about this going on in my house.” Steve said tiredly. Steve needed space this weekend after what went down last week. He *had* planned on getting really drunk and blasting music as loud as he wanted until he passed out on the floor, but that so wasn’t happening now.

“Hey, no need to turn on me here. Just checking on you.” Hopper looked at Steve defensively and curiously. “Mind if I stay a bit?” Great. *Yes, I very do much mind.*

“No, you’re welcome to stay as long as you need.” Steve said while walking into the kitchen. He poured a glass of water and was about to start on dinner before Dustin called from the living room.

“Steve, did you fall in here?” Someone called from the living room. *Shit .*

Steve regretted not cleaning up the stain from last weekend, but he hadn’t have the energy to. He’d felt more tired than he has since he started babysitting, and still driving the kids around drained him even more. He slowly walked into the living room and pretended to be confused.

“Weird. I don’t remember falling? Must’ve been super buzzed- I

mean, I must've been really tired." Steve covered up a lie with another lie. Part of him thought it was clever, the other part knew it was pathetic.

"Steve, how long has this been here? It's pretty dry? I just-"

"Dustin, chill. It will work itself out, I just need a rag and bleach-"

"You fell and don't even remember it. That's my problem. There's your blood on your floor and you're concerned about cleaning it up. What the hell dude?" Dustin countered, leaving Steve quiet. *How the fuck do I respond to that? Truth? Tears?*

"What do you want me to do? It's the best I've got. Cleaning. Now you nerds go set up for the game." Steve said, the words leaving his mouth before he could think about them.

The kids felt more distant than ever, Hopper was still in his house, and Steve was cleaning up his own blood from pinewood floors. Today's been fucking great.

11. Chapter 11

Summary for the Chapter:

In which everyone tells Steve to talk about his feelings

Notes for the Chapter:

Mentions of abuse

“Steve, are you okay?” Will quietly asked as the group took a snack break. Steve was slightly taken back by the boy, but nodded slightly.

“Steve, you don't have to lie. Why did you lie about falling outside? You clearly fell in here. Is... is someone... you know about my shitty father problems. What about you?” Will asked quietly, as so the others wouldn't hear him. For some reason, Steve felt like he was going to throw up.

“Will, buddy, I'm fine. I really did fall, and I guess I just got confused with the pool?” Steve told him. It wasn't a complete lie, was it?

“Steve, I understand. We don't have to talk now, and you don't have to talk to me, but find someone. I had Jonathan. Whatever is happening... you're not to blame, okay?” Will gently placed his small hand on his shoulder with most assured expression he'd ever seen.

It felt weird, having the small and fragile boy be so sure of something concerning feelings, considering the boy was also pretty fucked up himself.

He's been through more shit then me, he has a right to say that for himself. Dad is trying his best for me and he deals with me, so I'm way better off then Will was with that money starved bastard.

“Maybe one day, Will. Thanks buddy.” Steve smiled at the boy. Will wasn't impressed.

Steve was letting the kids stay out in the pool while he flipped through his moms old records he'd found in the basement. He hadn't even heard the door open, so when a firm hand grabbed his shoulder Steve let out a small screech.

“Calm down kid, its me.” Hopper said while backing up from him. He looked over Steve's shoulder and looked at some of the records with a gleam in his eyes.

“Look at that; This was real music,” Hopper laughed fully while looking at the covers, his hand tracing them carefully. Steve assumed Hopper didn't have much time to sit back and listen to music anymore, so he appreciated the moment of seeing the man been at the notes.

Steve smiled while Hopper gently picked up one of the old albums and motioned towards the player as to ask if it was okay. Steve nodded and Hopper set up and let the music flow in the room.

Hopper's eyes twinkled as he hummed along with the songs and tapped his foot. Once the first song was over he was still smiling, and it was the most innocent thing Steve had seen in a while.

"Thanks kid. The last time I listen to those.... Hell, it was probably when I was your age. I just don't have time for it anymore," Hopper told Steve as he drummed his fingers on the couch.

"I used to love music. I'd go over to Joyce's and we'd jam out to these till the sky went dark. Then my dad... well, I'll leave at he wasn't exactly the most helpful guy around. Made me get a job to support him and myself, and from then on out work became my everything. Work, school, and Joyce. That was it." Hopper said while lighting a cigarette.

Steve just sat, unsure of what to say. He felt bad for Hopper; Steve was a teen who had been given a good life by his father, and here he was about to complain about his own life.

"It was actually my work that got me away from that bastard though, so it want all bad. I learned grit and patience make the pay off the sweetest thing ever. I didn't do it alone though, Steve. No one can keep their problems to themselves. Joyce helped me a lot." Hopper looked at Steve directly and firmly.

"Uh, thanks Hopper, but I'm-"

"Steve, you're not fine. I know it's hard to talk to people about it; maybe you feel unworthy to talk about it, but you're a good kid."

“You deserve help, you really do. I just need you to know that I am in your corner. If not me, go to one of the kids. I think that's what Joyce's boy was talking about to you, wasn't it?” Hopper asked.

What the fuck is happening. I just want to not, what the fuck. Holy shit, is he right? I mean, he's Hopper and-

“Thank you.”

“Hey Steve.” Will approached him as Steve was sipping his coffee.

“Hey Will- wait, what are you doing up?” Steve glanced down at his watch that read 3 AM. Will laughed firefly.

“You try sleeping with Dustin's sleep talk. He's currently listing an assortment of lizard facts. The others are taking notes.” Will explained. Steve couldn't tell if he was joking or not.

“Of course he is. Want anything?” Steve asked while he walked into the kitchen. Will called for water and leftover cookies.

“Steve, do you want to talk?” Will asked quietly. Steve considered

telling the boy. Will just seemed so concerned, and it's highly unlikely the boy would tell hopper. *The worst he would do is tell Jonathan, right?*

“Um, alright? I... shit, this is weird. Uh, okay, um-” Steve stuttered as he talked, suddenly forgetting everything how to talk. Steve was ready to hear Will laugh at him, mock his weakness and stupidity. But he didn't, and Steve relaxed a bit.

“Well, I guess I should start off with my mom. My birth mom, that is. She died of a brain tumor a couple of years ago. By the time we found out it was already on the last stage; my dad moved her to a hospital in a desperate attempt to prolong her life, but it just ended up making her more sad and lonely. She died alone, and it was because I hated visiting her. She had asked to see me, that day. But I just... I couldn't. She died alone at four o'clock in the afternoon because her son tried to fuc*ing drown out his problems.”

“Two months later, my dad marries Ernesteen. She hated me from the start, and I hated her too,” Steve laughed without humor, “I was so full of hate after my mom died, a little bitch to everyone. My dad... he tried, I guess. He wanted happiness, or a replacement for my mom- I don't know. The both of us were pretty fucked up about her death, and I think he felt empty until he met Ernesteen. I think that's why he...” Steve drew a long breath for words he'd never said out loud.

“Why he just ignored everything that she's done. She just... I feel so weak, being the one to be hit, and by a girl. I just can't bring myself to defend myself anymore. She has so much anger in her; and he just turns the other way. Doesn't try to stop her, and sure as hell doesn't do anything to pick up what's left of me.” A dull ache was replacing where Steve's stomach used to be, but he didn't stop and recalled one

of the times that he still thought about.

“When I was 13, she just slammed me into the pool and just held me under there. I don't know why. She was just so *angry* . I just shut down after it, and ran away to Tommy's house for three days. I learned that was a mistake when she fucked me up so bad I couldn't move. Of course, she told the school I went on vacation for a week.” Steve remembered. His skin felt scratchy and numb as he brushed back his hair repeatedly. Will just looked at him, ready for Steve's words to continue. But they didn't. It was too much. This all was just so everything was just *wrong* .

Steve continued to try to steady his breathing, and Will continued sending supportive looks. Steve's chest swelled and he had a massive headache. Steve just closed his eyes. He felt so weak, talking about it. Some of it was relieving, but it all felt like Steve was just putting himself on a huge line that was ready to break and had decided to jump off of it.

Notes for the Chapter:

Yo I've been like,, so tired and in sorry if this chapter felt off,, I'm trying,,,

12. Chapter 12

Notes for the Chapter:

Warning: Abuse

Steve sent Will to bed after he regained a degree of responsibility. When Steve was sure that happened, he grabbed a portable radio and headed outside.

Steve turned it up, put it on a table, and jumped in the pool. He found himself at the bottom of the pool, looking at the sky through burning and blurry eyes. When he came up for air, the water popped out of ears and a familiar tune came on.

Boys don't cry.

“Fuck You, universe. I'm not crying, shut up bitch.” He said to nothing in particular. He was, however, crying. He was crying over everything that had happened, and damn it, it felt good. He cried over all the shit he's done to hurt people, and he cried over how things have changed. When the song ended, he found himself doing laps around the pool to cool off.

Steve looked at his mother, expecting her to be angry that he broke the bowl. He'd been messing around in the kitchen and knocked it over, and then proceeded to fall in the glass after trying to pick it up.

Steve was young at the time, and he walked with shame to get his mom

and tell her what happened. He had blood on his chin and hands, and Steve had never seen his mom so scared.

"Baby, what happened?" She picked him up while rushing him to the bathroom.

"I broke a bowl..."

"Did you try to pick it up yourself?" She asked while cleaning off his little hands. He nodded shyly, and she kissed his forehead. She noticed her baby boy was on the verge of tears, but was too stubborn to let it out.

"It's okay to cry honey, it's one of the few things humans all know how to do."

"I would never love you any less because you cried, my beautiful boy. Be proud of your emotions."

"Steve, this is the last time we're talking about this."

"Dad, she's actually insane. Don't you at least think you should wait-"

"Steve, I said shut. The Fuck. Up. I deserve to be happy. I'm going to marry Ernesteen, you're going to be a good son for once, and we're going to move on. Don't you think I deserve that much?"

"You don't have the right to say anything about me Ernesteen--"

"I have every damn right. I'm alive, aren't I?" Ernesteen told the boy. Steve was trying to leave the house, but she apparently had other plans. When he scoffed and walked away, she threw the box in her hands down to the floor.

"You will listen to ME!" She yelled at him, making him stop in his tracks. She seized the opportunity to grab him by his collar and topple him to the floor.

"I am the authority in this house. I help pay the bills, I've helped feed you, I've done everything. You've done nothing but be a useless brat. You will listen to me, got it?" She said with unwavering power.

Steve couldn't even squirm under her grip, the woman older and stronger than the small pre-teen. She pulled on his hair when he didn't answer. He nodded quickly to her.

Steve had gotten dressed for bed after a very brief shower, and he maybe got 30 minutes in before Dustin barged in singing *Eye of the Tiger* for some ungodly reason.

Fuck everything.

He was just so damn tired. Not even for the fact he hadn't slept much; it was just an overwhelming collapsing in his brain. Steve didn't say anything before going to the kitchen to make some pancakes for the kids, since cooking seems to be the only thing he seems to be good for.

He couldn't do it. He struggled with every little thing; he almost broke down when he couldn't find the milk. Then Dustin rolled into the kitchen.

“Hey dipshit, want any help?” Dustin yawned peacefully. Steve nodded and rubbed his nose. “What first then?”

“Well, I can't find the fucking milk, so I'm off to a bad start. Go check in the mini fridge in the basement please.” Dustin scurried off and Steve smiled a bit. While he did feel overwhelmed, he was glad he had the kids that actually seemed to care.

Dustin came back soon after, milk in hand and singing some sort of victory song. He placed on the counter next to Steve and waited patiently while Steve mixed the rest together.

“Have you ever made pancakes before Dustin?”

“Nope! My mom doesn't like them, so we just make cheese toast or some shit.” Dustin said sadly while stirring the mix.

“Well, you're a damn pro at it, honestly. Here, let's put one on the skillet...” They walked over to the pan and Steve watched as Dustin carefully put the mix in a somewhat circular shape. He waited patiently to flip it, and it honestly turned out good for the kid's first pancake. Steve ruffled Dustin's hair as they split it to eat.

“Cheers to cooking.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for not updating per my usual schedule! It's been a really weird week.

13. Chapter 13

Steve hated not being able to sleep when you're tired; it's the most stupid thing your body can do. Steve's eyes refused to stay closed while he sat in the silence of his house.

He stared at the ceiling, and he's left just thinking about it's a bitch to think. He vaguely remembers his mother singing him to sleep as a kid, particularly when she sang *Amazing Grace* with her soft but off key voice.

Just thinking of her voice made him relax, but it was remembering that he will never get the chance to hear her again fucked him up. He really wanted to fucking sleep.

He ended up getting up to go to the bathroom and get some water, but when he saw himself in the mirror he just stopped for a while. Just looked at the curve of his hair, weird things about him that went unnoticed, like the small white scar directly under his lip.

Steve stared at his own eyes and eyebrows without thoughts other than why is his face his face, too tired to move and too entranced to give up.

"Fuck everything." He whispered to his reflection.

He finally fell asleep around 6, so he again got about thirty minutes

of sleep before being forced to get up. He considered just skipping, but the thought of missing another French class fucking sucked. He was failing at all his classes, so did it really matter?

Steve in the end decided that being late was the best option, so he strolled into science right before the lunch bell rang. He gave the teacher a shrug with a shit eating grin as he walked out. Nancy, Jonathan, and him had the same lunch period, so he usually avoided where they'd sit.

Which is why he started sitting in the auditorium.

True, Steve had very little faith that he could be in theatre, but they usually were doing fun games or acting out scenes for an upcoming musical.

This year, they were putting on *Les misérables*, so he could count this as studying for French. Steve wasn't totally sure he was supposed to be in here, but fuck it- no one seemed to care anyways.

It was weird seeing them break character or make jokes; they were all tense but so comfortable with what they were doing.

Steve had seen a lot of plays and shit before, due to his father being a rich guy and wanting to burn cash and time, but it was interesting seeing it all come together. Today though, they seemed to be getting fitted for outfits so everyone was chilling out, and Steve really didn't know what to do. Usually he just did math homework while he sat in the corner, listening to the songs.

One kid starts singing a song he recognized from it, and suddenly everyone tags in. It was clearly one of their favorites as the passion they put into it; it was fucking beautiful how they sang the big *One Day More*.

Music is a beautiful thing; it inspires people, comfort them, ect., but at this moment it felt free. Yes, this didn't have exactly a happy ending, but the whole theatre shook with the voices of the students. Steve might have forgotten to breathe, and the silence after it all was very shocking. The teacher (director?) laughed and clapped.

“Good, good! Now, get back to not that.” She had said while shooing people towards different directions. Steve hurried himself out as quietly as possible realising that the period was going to end.

As he headed to bio, he thought about going into battles and not winning; the same fear he had had, with his family and with the strange shit that has happened in secrecy was met with a bloody death in that musical. Yes, it was fictional, but Steve thought powers were magical less than two years ago.

Steve thought about the times he had stood up to her, but it's painful aftermath came back in a rush. He'd fought monsters with nothing but a spiked bat, but for some reason he couldn't stand up to a lady who should be been easy to fight. He felt so damn weak, Jesus; he wanted to listen to another one of his sad mixtapes while eating chocolate.

Steve didn't know what to do anymore. He wasn't smart enough for college, and he didn't want to work for his dad if it meant his dad insisting he stay home to save money. Maybe he could ask his dad about buying a theatre and controlling it. That's not anger worthy,

right? His dad has bought more stupid things before, like his step mom's wedding ring for example.

He rushed into the class room with a new found dream for his future.

14. Chapter 14

“Steve, Max has driven! Don't we deserve the chance to drive too?” Dustin whines in the back.

“That is a terrible example. I was unconscious, and we totally could've died the way she was driving. Either way, the answer is still no. This car is my girl, and you shitheads are going to crash her.”

“I'm in drivers ed!” Lucas chimed in.

“So fucking what? That's like telling me you're a doctor because you're in biology. Piss off, I'm the only one driving today and that is final, alright?” Steve spat angrily. He instantly felt bad, because it was just a step closer to becoming more and more like her. Steve took a deep breath and parked in the lot of an ice cream parlor and sighed.

“Alright, okay, you win. This doesn't mean you're all driving though, and we're going to some land my dad owns so Hopper doesn't fucking arrest me. For now though, we're going to enjoy some ice cream while I watch this party fall apart fighting for who drives first.”

It took about half an hour to get to the area. Steve doesn't really know what the fuck his dad was planning to with the land, and it's been about four years since he's actually even mentioned it, so Steve

wondered if he even remembered it. Steve didn't mind though, because it was a nice place to camp out (he found this out in the two weeks he was not allowed back in his own home.)

Hawkins was a quiet place, and it's outskirts were untouched by the modern world. The only sign of human touch the dirt paths made by Steve his freshman year so he could practice his driving.

Steve cruised into a stop while the kids patiently waited (or at least they were quiet so they could drive first.) He opened his door, ready for the kids to follow suit. They filed out of the car while buzzing with excitement.

“Alright, shithheads. Time to show me who's going to drive first, since you guys decided the one who hits Steve in the face with ice cream first was the obvious answer, and it was most definitely not Dustin. You shits are going to finish this the old fashioned way- a race. All tactics are up for the grab, but the only thing is don't kill each other.”

“The goal is to the end of the field and back. You have ten seconds. 10....5.... GO !” Steve yelled to the kids. They all took off like lightning, all except Will, who did a slower pace to conserve his energy. Lucas was taking off like a storm, Max close behind him. Dustin followed Mike by a couple of feet and Will continued at his steady pace.

When the turn happened, Steve watched as Will slowly picked up his pace gradually before reaching top speed and passing the others (who had slowed significantly down.) Steve laughed as Will came to a stop like a breeze. Steve ruffled the boy's hair as they waited for the rest to finish.

“Alright, the first driver is going to be Will. You guys get to another challenge to decide who's after that, so on and so forth. Come on Will, go get in. The rest of you shitheads go sit in the tables over there, and don't you move, understood?”

They were all surprisingly pretty good at driving (though Steve knows he'll forever have the blurry memory of Max driving burned into his fears), and it went pretty well considering that it was mostly their first time driving around.

Steve did feel good after the lessons and tips he had offered the kids. When Steve's dad had bought him the car, he also drove him around a bit. Steve thought about the happy day while helping them learn.

“Max, you're going to ace that drivers test, but you're still not allowed to drive my car around town.”

“I know, I know...” The teen rolled her eyes as she smoothly stopped the car. Steve smirked and got out, calling over the other kids from their spot.

“All right you shitheads, that was pretty good. I wouldn't mind doing this a couple times a week- as long you guys were up for that, of course.” Steve lazily told them as they nodded intently.

Steve was happy, the kids ready to go home after all their adrenaline drained out of them as they piled in the car.

The window's breeze lulled the kids to sleep while Steve drove peacefully home

15. Chapter 15

Steve had mixed feelings about cleaning.

On one hand, it was actually pretty relaxing once you get into the rhythm of doing it, but on the other hand it was really fucking draining (especially since it means his parents were coming home.) Steve did find the mindless work helpful in numbing his brain in preparation of his step-mom's shit.

Once Steve was finished with the house (minus the basement) he flopped face forward on the couch. Exhaustion settled on him as he moved his head to look at the clean empty room, and he was ready for his well deserved nap. The doorbell ringing sliced through the stale air and rattled him off the couch.

He sluggishly went to the door, knowing it was his parents armed with their painful comments, but opened it to see five kids holding pizza boxes.

"Go away, my family already bought girl scout cookies." Steve said while shutting the door. To his surprise, it swung back open (knocking over a vase, may he add) with supernatural force. El and Hopper were walking up to his door without care.

"Guys, you really can't come in. Jane can come and magically pick up every grain of goddamn dirt that spilled over my freshly vacuumed carpet though," Steve told them tiredly. Hopper raised an eyebrow at his bluntness, but Steve was not having this. His step-mom was already going to kill him, and Steve would rather not like on the hurt.

“I am not joking this time guys. My dad and mom are coming home, and my step-mom hates children within five feet of her pottery collection. Come back next week.” Steve said while closing the door. Hopper was the one to open it again.

“Harrington, Jane said she wants to be *here* . So that means we’re going to play their game and get fat on pizza. I’m sure your parents won’t mind you babysitting, especially if the sheriff is here to approve.” Hopper said while pushing the kids inside.

Dustin whistled as he looked at the practically sparkling interior.

“Looks like someone has a future career as a maid, Harrington.” Dustin joked. Steve didn’t laugh.

“Yeah, probably. Now go move your greasy as*es to the basement.” Steve watched the kids go (Hopper following Jane patiently.) Before heading to it himself. *This is so fucking bizarre. I should be asleep right now, not wondering how blood thirsty she’s going to be because of Steve screwing up her plans again.*

For a while, the party was just enjoying their pizza and drinks while playing D&D. Apparently, Jane had begged for Hopper to let her go, and he gave in as long as he got to go. Hopper seemed to be enjoying himself, but Steve was rigid and tense the whole time.

Steve felt his blood freeze when he heard the door open upstairs. He only remembers the vase when he heard his name being screamed

out. He rushes upstairs without hesitancy. Steve's father stares at him with disappointment and anger swirling in his eyes.

“Steve, you know how much she cares about a clean house. What have you been doing instead of cleaning? Getting high with your shitty friends or making more of a fool of me? You know your actions upset her, and me for that matter.” His dad said, glass crunching underneath his moving feet. “Pick it up, now.”

With that, he walked outside, and Steve hastily picked up as much as he could in a few seconds. The glass scratched his hands as he brushed it repeatedly to his palm. He slid to the trashcan, hoping to get as much as possible before one of them walked back in. On his way back he grabbed the broom and dustpan, and he began to sweep uselessly at the floor.

It's fucking carpet, what did you expect?

Steve asked himself as he got most of the dirt off the floor. Just as he regained some of his breathing though, she walked in. Steve quickly spoke.

“Before you start kicking my ass, I would like for you to know there is a cop downstairs with his badge on him. Thought you'd like to know.” Steve quickly stated as he backed away. She bawled her fist in anger, but stayed quiet.

“Don't use that tone with me, shithead. Take my bags to your father's and mine room, now, while I go chat with this *police officer* .” She said disdainfully. Steve didn't move.

"I really didn't know they were coming, I'm being honest. They didn't know and I'm sorry-"

"When I tell you to do something *do it* ." Her anger towards over Steve, and he stumbled back. He picked up the bags without another word.

Ernesteen had a way of convincing people she was a completely different person. She was happy and cheerful and always ready to be a shoulder to cry on towards the outside world, but behind locked doors she was Steve wonders if it really is his fault for all she does; maybe he did deserve it for being such a terrible person- maybe she had to beat out of him because she was trying to be nice.

He thought about what Will had said; that it wasn't his fault. Steve also thought about how nice the boy was, and he suspected he's always been that way. Steve has always been an asshole, so maybe Will is wrong about Steve.

He did deserve it.

16. Chapter 16

Summary for the Chapter:

The one where Steve's never going to be over Nancy but its okay because he's learning to respect that and also needs to get his life together (Just like an author who hasn't posted anything in 2 months WHOOPS)

Steve always thought the phrase “It could be worse,” was just originally a trick to pretend your situation isn't as bad as it.

“It could be worse,” Mike had said to Steve as he had dropped his head onto the table.

“You little shits will probably never be allowed near this house again.”

While Hopper had gone upstairs to talk with Steve's step-mom, and so Steve and the kids played without heart. He felt bad for bringing down the mood, but Steve knew that it was probably the truth, so there was no point in sugar coating the situation.

Jane sat on the floor somewhat under the table, at least somewhat hidden if one of his parents decided to come down stairs. Steve was more fearful of the look she kept giving Steve (If it was either hate or pity, Steve was sure he couldn't tell.)

“I'm sorry Steve, I Should have asked you-”

“Dustin, shut up. It wasn't your fault, Okay? I should have told you guys my parents were coming home. It's not your fault my step-mom hates anything that breathes.” Steve patted the boy's back before they continued playing. After what felt like hours, Hopper came down the stairwell.

“Alright kids, get your asses up. We're outta here.” Hopper stated firmly. Steve stood up and started to herd the kids upstairs, and Hopper stood at the bottom watching all the kids file out. He stopped Steve and held him back.

“Steve, you are going to call me if you need anything, okay?” Hopper seriously asked, holding his shoulder. Steve just nodded and smiled.

“Steve, go clean yourself up.” Steve's dad said, having found Steve on the floor in the basement.

Steve didn't want to face the consequences of the previous night and had slept in the basement to avoid Ernesteen. He would rather be cold than bruised. He honestly wasn't expecting his dad to even bother getting him up at all.

Steve got up without much noise and practically ran out of the house and to his car. He didn't quite know where he was going, but no one was stopping him from leaving, so it shouldn't be that bad. He grabbed one of his depressing tapes and put it in as he started the car, and turned up the music as he got the fuck out of the driveway.

Steve had stopped in a ice cream parlor that was near the land, and got double moose tracks and a root beer float to drown his problems away. It was working well until the door bells rang in the front.

“Steve?” A feminine voice rang across the room. *Why the fuck is she here?*

Nancy came more into view and stood beside the table. Steve awkwardly made an attempts to brush his hair, but it was no use. He was sure his hair looked like a melting ice cream cone licked by a cow. Nonetheless, Nancy presented herself and looked like was debating sitting down.

“I didn't think you drove yet, Nance.” He finally said, the thought crossing his mind after a bit of small talk. She smiled wearily.

“I don't. Did you not see Johnathan with me?” Ah, that made sense. Jonathan probably knew about this place because it was a little strange (as it was in the middle of nowhere. It did make a killer root beer float though.) Steve felt like this weekend just planned on getting more and more shitter as it went on.

“Right, right. Well, I'm going to start heading o-”

“Nancy, I didn't know whether to get you a small or a medium, so I got a large!” Jonathan could be heard. Clearly, the other boy hadn't noticed the Steve either, because as soon as Steve came into view his demeanor shrank.

While the three were mostly alright with each other, it always feels like all smiles are forced. Maybe it was just Steve. The way things ended with Nancy made him feel really empty. Another fact was the constant reminder of the nights they spent killing demogorgons. This might make things feel a little tense afterwards. Not to mention he's always been a complete asshole to Jonathan.

“Oh, hey Steve. How are you?” Jonathan quietly asked, following Nancy in standing. He had been so close to her, and it hurt seeing someone stand so comfortably with Nancy, but Steve put off. If he actually wants to be a better person, he needs let go of her.

Steve smiled the best he could.

“I'm doing all right. I decided last minute to go camping, so that's a thing.” Not a total lie. It wasn't like his parents would care. Hopefully.

“Are your parents with you then? Will told me about their little fiasco and crashing into your house. He was really sorry by the way.” Jonathan said, obviously trying to make conversation. Nancy looked surprised.

“Wait, their home for once? That's a miracle by itself...” Nancy mumbled so quietly he barely heard her. Steve wanted to laugh at the

word miracle.

“No, I’m by myself. Needed some fresh air,” Steve added, “I’ve been feeling really tense since all that shit went down, you know? I’m hoping some fresh air will help.”

The two nodded and started to eat their ice cream once they slid in the booth. They ate in quiet silence, and Steve sipped his root beer float. He got up to leave, but Nancy stopped him while he got up.

“Don’t forget we here for you, okay?” She told him as he escaped from her grasp. He nodded and smiled at her.

Steve ran out of root beer while the two left holding each others hands.

17. Chapter 17

A quick review: Steve is on his way to the land he owns where he'll set up camp in hopes to avoid going home after running out once his stepmom got home. He stopped on the way to drown his sorrows in a root beer float, only to find a minor emotional confirmation from Nancy and Jonathan. They left soon after, and Steve was left to go set up camp in his dad's land.

Steve almost cried at the walkman in the back; he knew he needed to preserve gas and his battery, so keeping the car on was not an option. Which meant no stereo, which would have ended in Steve crying or having way too much anxiety of what was in the woods.

He decided to keep the device off until night, not knowing how much life his batteries had. Of course, this meant him doing really random shit around the field, including starting to carve a piece of wood with a swiss army knife he also had in his trunk. When he was just about to finish his masterpiece (a crappy carving of a bunch of flowers), Steve heard a car coming down the road, and pushed himself closer to the tree he was next to.

The car pulled into the field (right over a nice thing of butterfly weeds. Dick.) and rolled to a stop. He made out details of the car, and wanted to curl up and die for the thousandth time.

“Hopper?” He called out, his voice betraying himself. Hopper looked into his direction confusingly.

“Harrington? What the hell are you doing out here?” Hopper asked while jogging over to him. Steve stepped into view, trying to think of excuses. He couldn't imagine *I wanted a random campout in the middle of nowhere without telling anyone* would go to well. Before either of them got any further of a chance to talk, Steve made out another figure from the car.

“Is that El-Jane? What are *you* doing, Hopper?” Steve bounced back the question. Hopper was standing beside him now, and he too was looking at Jane come closer.

“Well, Mike told her about you guys’ going out driving, so I just thought...” Hopper trailed off as Jane stood impatiently.

“What's with the sudden interest in driving?”

“I don't know. She's going to high school, right? Maybe being able to drive will give her a leg up.” Hopper nonchalantly states, obviously taking his time and letting her wait.

“TURN. *TURN THE GODDAMN WHEEL BEFORE WE CRASH, GOD SAVE ME, MARY HELP ME-*”

Steve had managed to not have a heart attack, but just barely.

Hopper had been fairly chill, but he was in the back. Teaching a rebellious teen who has superpowers was harder than you'd think. You could tell she liked being in control of the wheel, but was probably anxious. Probably.

When they stopped the car fully, Steve felt alive again. Jane could handle herself, but having the responsibility of teaching someone who didn't have a clue what they were doing was pretty stressful. God bless drivers ed teachers.

“Okay, okay, good! That was good!” Steve encouraged her as he left the car. Hopper left the car in suit, but El stayed in the car, probably still in that weird first drive shock.

“God kid, I thought you were going to have a heart attack. You good?” Hopper asked him. Steve smiled back and nodded. Hopper turned serious quickly.

“Kid, don't lie to me- do you have a home to sleep in tonight?” Hopper clamped his hand on his shoulder.

“No.” Steve answered in a small voice.

“Okay. In that case, you're coming with us. No objections, okay?”

....

Steve was a little weary of entering the cabin again after the events of

apocalypse 2.0, but he did so without too much trouble. The duo had to live here for about a year more (Mike leaks information when he's thinking about Jane.)

Jane would eye him every once in awhile while she flicked through channels. Whether it was in confusion or concern, Steve would never know. He watched whatever she chose, and tried to put his anxieties in a box tucked neatly into the deep pits of his mind.

“Steve, how do you like your burger?” Hopper’s voice came from a walkie talkie. Steve picked it up.

“Well done, I'm not an animal Hop.”

“You’re missing out kid.” Hopper replied half jokingly. Steve settled back into the couch, trying not to think about the possibility of his dad looking for him. Or him not. Steve wasn't sure which was worse.

Hopper came home soon after that, to go bags in tote.

Dinner was nice, and very awkward. Steve didn't try to strike up a conversation, and had a feeling Hop wasn't used to a lot of talking anyways. Or so he thought.

“So, Steve. You lookin’ for a job?” Hopper questioned Steve nonchalantly. Steve raised his eyebrows in surprise. “Just asking. The burger joint had a wanted sign up.” Hop explained.

“I guess so then? I mean, I can help out with any expenses, or I-”

“Woah! Breathe kid. I just know jobs help. Its just part time. Builds experience for after high school.”

Hopper assured him. Steve still felt very anxious, but less so because of Hopper.

“Thank you, Hop. I mean it.”

“No need to thank me for providing you the basics of living, Steve. Go get your stuff inside. I can take you to get an application if you want, and if you don't, we'll make eggos.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Hahahahahaha guess who took four months to write and it turned really dry so quickly but o saw single mother part time worker Steve Harrington in a tweet and was shook

18. Last (sudden) chapter

Notes for the Chapter:

Mentions abuse/hurt, blood, abuse

Steve seriously underestimated how much a restaurant job can drain you. Like, full on, Steve wanted to just slam his face on the grill. The thing was though, having a job just felt *freeing*. It did make him feel like he was actually doing shit with his life for once, so that was a plus.

Plus, getting money that you earned is a beautiful thing, especially since he kept most of it.

Steve had been saving up some of his pay check to buy something nice for Hopper and El, but he still didn't know what in the everliving fuck he was going to get them (a minor problem.) So flipping patties and waiting for summer to end wasn't too terrible.

Then *they* walked in and his hand slipped just a bit, the heat warning him before his hand touched the hot surface.

“Sweet mother of God, why do you hate me more than the rest?” Steve whispered, picking up his spatula again, hoping his parents wouldn't see him. Everything sucked at the moment, but at least he didn't fucking burn his skin away. His mom always said try to keep his hands softer than butter (why, he'll never know. Its a fucking weird thing to remember at such a horrifying time.)

Steve wasn't entirely sure what would happen if they saw him. Ignore him? Flip out? He shrunk, trying to be very out of view from the cashier. Then he started wondering if they cared, or if they just

assumed he was gone for good. Tonight was definitely going to be alcohol ice cream floats and sad music for him. Just to let him wallow in his sorrows and self-pity before waking up to a massive hangover.

“Harrington! Those patties are about to be charcoal if you don’t flip ‘em now!” One of his coworkers yelled from behind him.

Well fuck.

Steve slowly lifted his head to only make eye contact with his step mom. His dad looked almost sad, but it was hard to tell under all the commotion. She made a step forward, her polite smile turning more threatening in the span of a few seconds.

“Steve! Honey, we’ve been so worried! Come on, let’s get you home.” Steve heard her say from behind the counter, before he went full flight mode. He ran to the backdoor, and tried to get to his car, but his father beat him to it.

“I thought it looked familiar.” His father hissed while grabbing his shirt. “I thought you were dead, Steve. I know I said to get out, but this? Did you ever plan on telling me you were alive? What would your mother think?”

Steve didn't know where his father's concern was coming from. He's always been apathetic about his son; maybe Esther was too much for him to handle. The patter of footsteps rolled from the doors.

“Harrington, do you need me to call Ho-” Steve’s manager ran outside, Esther behind him. Steve cut him off slyly.

“Nah, I’m good! My mom and pop’s were just worried about me. There was a bit of a misunderstanding about my hours, and all that,” Steve said calmly. Steve’s manager nodded slowly, obviously not sure if he believed the claim.

“I’m inside if you need me Steve.” Was all he said before turning back inside.

Steve couldn’t tell whether he wanted his manager to call Hopper for him. He felt overwhelmed; frozen by the fear of his safe haven being discovered.

“Come on, get in the car. We’ll get your car later.” His father pushed him subtly to Esther’s car. Steve stopped after a few seconds.

“I can’t just leave, I’ll be fired.” Steve said emptily. Esther grabbed his arm, her nails digging into his arms.

“You’ve got bigger fucking problems than a minimum wage job.”

Steve went into full shut-down, his movements dull and his mouth glued shut.

Everything fucking hurts. The once comforting coldness of the basement floor now stung his bruises and scratches, the one light in the room searing his eyes and giving him the most splitting fucking headache he's ever had. Fuck, fuck, fuck. He doesn't remember anything, just her and then fucking red.

"Steve! Where are you?" He heard someone yell from upstairs. Steve just curled in on himself, waiting for the next level of pain to come. Maybe he'll fucking die, fuck if he knew.

"Steve?" A small, but gentle voice came from the stairwell. For a second, he thought it was his mom, fully making him think he was going to die. But his mom wasn't there. No, it was Jane fuckin' Hopper. Steve tried to let out that shocked laugh people do, but it wound up being just a really weird squeak.

"Steve!" El ran down the stairs, and a slow stomp followed her. Steve barely saw the rim of a familiar hat before blacking out.

When Steve woke up, everything sped up. They found Esther hovering over his dad's body after they found Steve.

Apparently his dad finally stood up for his son, and it was the last thing he ever did. His dad gave everything to his company; god only knows why.

The trials came soon after. They found Esther guilty of manslaughter, and she just laughed when she saw him.

Steve didn't know if he was recovering, but he was trying to.

His kids needed him.

Notes for the Chapter:

So, I felt like I needed to give this story some kind of ending rather than just slowly kill it off. When I first started writing it, I felt good about it!! But then I started trying to force ideas into the story that just didn't fit, and I feel like I couldve done better. This story was a bit of a mess, but I hope you enjoyed!! I might try to rewrite it, but for now, it's done :D

Author's Note:

Hope you enjoy! (First chapter is slow, if you want to be a beta reader please talk to me on my tumblr/instagram @lockedinwithlife).